



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE LOT ORACLE AT DELPHI

BY FRANK EGGLESTON ROBBINS

The inquiry¹ begins with a graceful painting on the inside surface of a fifth-century Attic cylix now in the museum at Berlin (Fig. 1).² Aegeus is seen in the very act of consulting the oracle about his childlessness, and is about to receive the obscure answer which, according to the story preserved by the Greek authors, puzzled him so much.³ The column which divides the scene shows that the consultation takes place within the sanctuary; Aegeus, at the right, awaits the answer of the prophetess seated to the left on a tripod, and the names of the two, Aegeus and Themis, are given above them. For the rest, Furtwängler's comment may be quoted: "Die Priesterin, durch deren Mund Apollon spricht, sitzt, genau so wie es die Pythia zur Zeit des Malers auch tat, auf dem Dreifuss, um göttliche Eingebung zu erhalten. Sie wird hier Themis (Θέμις) genannt, mit einem mythologisch nicht gerechtfertigten Namen. Denn unter Themis verstanden die Griechen eine Doppelgängerin der Erdgöttin, die ihrerseits einst allerdings auch in Delphi Sprüche erteilte, aber schon vor Apollon, sogar vor Phoebe, welche dieser ablöste. Dem schlanken, züchtigen Mädchen, das wir hier sehen, fehlt ja auch völlig die matronale Erscheinung welche sich vom Bild der Erdgöttin nicht trennen lässt. Aigeus konnte nur eine Pythia befragen. Dichterischer Sprachgebrauch, welcher Orakelsprüche mit *θέμιστες* bezeichnet, verführte wohl dazu, der Sprecherin Apollons den Namen Themis zu verleihen. Das Mädchen auf dem Prophetenstuhl sinnt in sich gekehrt, in der Rechten Apollons heiligen Lorbeer, in der

¹ The author wishes hereby to acknowledge the great help he has derived from his colleague, Professor Campbell Bonner of the University of Michigan. Many of the essential arguments of this paper are due to Professor Bonner's suggestion.

² Furtwängler-Reichhold, *Griechische Vasenmalerei*, Taf. 140; *Arch. Anzeiger* (1854), p. 427; Winter, *Jüngere attische Vasen*, p. 52; Gerhard, *Auserlesene Vasenbilder*, 4, pp. 103-4, Taf. 327-28; Müller-Wieseler, *Denkmäler der alten Kunst*, II, 947; Welcker, *Alte Denkmäler*, II, 237; Decharme, *Mythologie*, p. 107, Fig. 65; J. E. Harrison, *Themis*, p. 481.

³ Euripides *Medea* 678 ff.; Plutarch *Vit. Thes.* 3 ff.

Linken eine Schale, wie wir annehmen müssen, angefüllt mit dem Wasser der kastalischen Quelle, welches sie zum Weissagen begeistert."



FIG. 1

Furtwängler devotes most of his attention to the name given to the prophetess: does the painter intend her really to be the Themis, who, according to one account, took over the ancient oracle at Delphi from the earth-goddess Gaia, her mother, and in turn was succeeded by Apollo, or, according to another, receiving the oracle from Gaia turned it over to Phoebe, who in her turn gave it to Apollo;¹ or is she simply a priestess of Apollo, a Pythia, named Themis perhaps because the responses of the god were sometimes called *θέμιαι*? Fortunately the present investigation does not require a definite solution

¹ Paus. x. 5. 6; Aesch. *Eum.* 1 ff.

of this difficulty; but at the same time Furtwängler's conclusions are not, to me at least, entirely satisfactory. It is, in the first place, a very striking coincidence that the painter should have chosen to assign to a mortal prophetess the name Themis, when the tradition that the goddess Themis once ruled the Delphic shrine was so well known; this is a *prima facie* improbability; and it may be doubted, furthermore, whether the purchaser of this vase would appreciate such a reason as Furtwängler gives for the assignment of the name. Nor is it agreed among archaeologists that Themis should be represented, as he says, by a matronly type;¹ and, with regard to the vase under discussion, other critics are content to believe that our Themis is really the goddess.² As for the undoubted fact that all the accessories of the scene are Delphic—the laurel,³ the tripod, and, we may add, the phialé—this need cause no great concern. The vase-painter has taken them from the Delphi he knew; if he tried to represent some more obscure form of consultation, his public would probably fail to understand the narrative he is trying to tell, and would certainly fail to locate the scene at Delphi; and, in fine, he is no archaeologist, but only an artisan of moderate education and attainments, and we may expect of him inconsistency and even inaccuracy. Surely to such a man it would be natural enough to show Themis, the predecessor of Apollo, in the surroundings of Apollo's priestess, and giving oracles in the already time-honored manner.⁴

¹ Welcker, *Alte Denkm.*, II, 325 (and Taf. XVI, 31), in his essay "Themis als Schlafprophetin," endeavors to show that the figure of a maiden sleeping in front of the Delphic tripod is Themis; the sleeping figure by no means agrees with Furtwängler's notion of the type. Themis as Justitia (see *s.v.*, *ap.* Daremberg-Saglio, *Dict.*, III, 1, p. 777, with the citation of Aulus Gellius xiv. 4) was represented as a maiden, the *Astraea virgo*.

² Welcker, *op. cit.*, 237: "Dass anachronistisch Themis anstatt des Apollons ihm wahrsagt schmeichelt in lockrer Weise der attischen Stammeseitelkeit"; also Decharme, *loc. cit.*; Miss Harrison, *op. cit.*, p. 480: "seated on it is not any one particular Pythia but Themis herself."

³ Of the laurel Miss Harrison, *loc. cit.*, remarks, "she is *thallophoros*." But the laurel must be indicative of Delphi as well as the other attributes.

⁴ It is to be noted that Euripides speaks of a tripod of Themis, to which Apollo has succeeded:

ἄδικος ἄδικα τότ' ἄρ' ἔλακεν ἔλακεν ἀπὸ—
φονὸν δ' ἔπι τρίποδι Θέμιδος ἄρ' ἔδικασε
φόνον ὁ Λοξίας ἐμᾶς μητέρος.

The passage is *Orestes* 162-65 (Murray's text) and is of later date than the vase-painting.

There is, then, after all no compelling reason for the adoption of Furtwängler's dictum that the girl is a priestess and no goddess. Welcker¹ on the contrary has well said that her anachronistic appearance here flatters the Attic pride of race. Certainly the scene, if shared by the father of the national hero, Theseus, and the ancient goddess Themis herself, is no commonplace one. But however we decide this point, it remains to consider the more important question of the girl's attitude and what she is doing with the objects which she holds in her hands, in the explanation of which Furtwängler's statements, I feel, are quite inadequate.

No one can, I think, doubt that Themis is on the point of uttering the answer for which Aegeus came; that is, the painter has shown no preliminary rite, but the most dramatic moment of the whole story, the actual delivery of the oracle. The laurel twig and the phialé, then, are, strictly speaking, out of place; for we read that the laurel was chewed, and the water of the sacred spring drunk, before the answer was returned, as a means of inspiration.² In fact, the drinking of water from some sacred spring seems to have been a preliminary rite at all the oracles of Apollo.³ The anachronism, however, by which the laurel and the phialé appear in the painting is a common one in the Greek vases; by this method the artist either epitomizes a whole narrative by inserting in the culminating scene, which alone is represented, details suggesting the previous steps, or simply indicates more definitely the place or the mythological story that is treated by the use of such objects in a purely symbolic manner.⁴ Now the laurel may be easily accounted for in this way, but the pose of the girl's figure absolutely forbids us to say the same of the phialé. She is too intent upon it or its contents for it to be merely symbolic of Delphi, and, furthermore, it is not enough to assert that she is about to drink the cup;⁵ this, the usual explanation, is entirely

¹ *Supra*, p. 280, n. 2.

² Laurel chewed: Lucian *Bis. acc.* 2; water drunk, Lucian *ibid.*, 1 and *Herm.* 60; Rohde, *Psyche* (2d ed.), II, 58, n. 1; Hermann, *Lehrbuch* (Heidelberg, 1858), II, 257, sec. 40, n. 12; Castalia or Cassotis: Bouché-Leclercq, *La divination dans l'antiquité*, II, 100, n. 3.

³ Frazer on Paus. ix. 2. 1.

⁴ Gardner, *Principles of Greek Art*, pp. 246, 279–80.

⁵ There is no indication that Themis received inspiration thus.

inadequate to account for her curious absorption as she looks at it. It is part of the painter's story which he has admirably told in the intentness of the prophetess; the cup is no mere symbol, but integral and essential to this very scene, and to find the key to the whole situation we must find out what the phialé was used for, what is in it, and why Themis so earnestly contemplates it, discarding at the outset the theory that it contained water from the sacred spring, which when drunk was to inspire her.

Perhaps the explanation that will most readily suggest itself is that Themis is reading the future in the surface of a liquid in the phialé. This would account very well for her intentness, and if the scene were not so plainly Delphic might perhaps be accepted without further question, for there is abundant evidence to show that the Greeks practiced lekanomancy or hydromancy in various forms.¹ But I have been unable to discover any proof, either literary² or artistic,³ that lekanomancy was ever employed at the oracular establishment at Delphi, and since it seems quite certain, both from the painting itself and from the literary version of the Aegeus legend, that the artist intended to locate this scene at Delphi, I am content to dismiss the suggestion that Themis is here shown in the rôle of lekanomancer.

There are, however, some scenes of ancient art which from their likeness in certain respects to the Themis vase deserve to be examined in connection with it. These include groups where Apollo and others hold a phialé and seem to be engaged in divinatory rites, and the same specious resemblance to lekanomancy is present in most of them. It is no easy task to sift out those which are pertinent from the great number which are wholly irrelevant; for in many parting scenes a girl proffers a phialé to a warrior or warriors, and often gods are represented with a phialé as a libation vessel or as an even more indefinite attribute. The only groups which will have

¹ See Daremberg-Saglio, art. "Divinatio"; Pauly, art. "Magia"; Bouché-Leclercq, *op. cit.*, I, 184 ff., 339-40; III, 354; W. R. Halliday, *Greek Divination*, chaps. vii, viii.

² Paus. vii. 21. 13 tells of a spring of Apollo at Kyaneai in Lycia where hydromantic oracles were delivered; but there is no such testimony as to Delphi.

³ Daremberg and Saglio give two illustrations of hydromantic acts, *Dict.*, II, 1, Figs. 2478 and 2481. Neither concerns Delphi.

significance for the present purpose are those where the phialé is something more than the mere parting or welcoming cup or the libation vessel, and I am inclined to think that it will be possible to work out an interpretation for them along with the Themis vase and on the same lines.

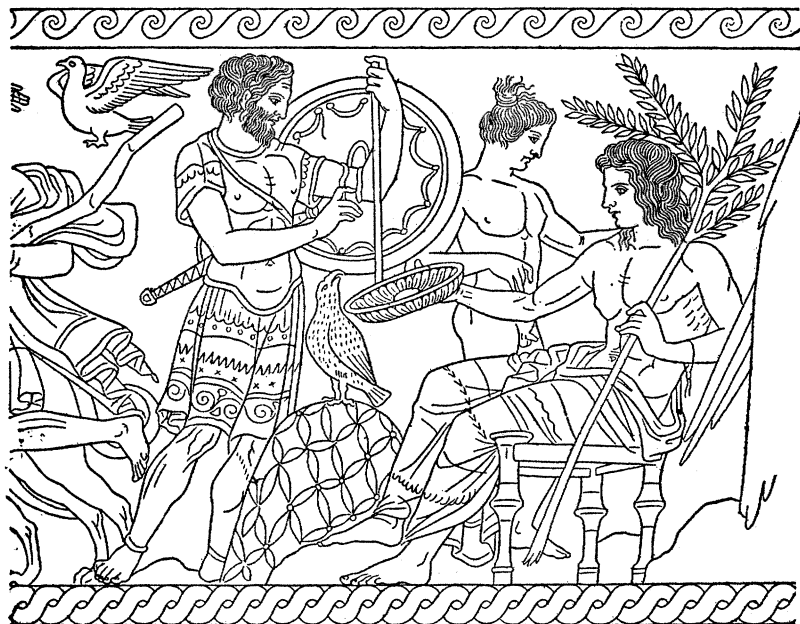


FIG. 2

Most striking among these is the scene engraved on a Praenestine cista of the Barberini collection, showing, according to the current interpretation, the consultation of Apollo by Oedipus at Delphi (Fig. 2).¹ Apollo, seated by the Delphic omphalos and holding the laurel branch in his left hand, extends toward Oedipus with his right a patera which tilts noticeably toward Oedipus. The latter regards the contents earnestly, and evinces plain surprise and even consternation at what he sees. It must certainly be said of this, as of the Themis vase, that in view of the attitude of Oedipus it is wrong to imagine that the cup is only a welcoming or parting bowl or

¹ *Mon. Ined.*, VIII, Pls. XXV-XXX; Daremberg-Saglio, I, art. "Apollo," Fig. 383.

one for pouring a libation. It is perfectly clear that the proffering of the cup and the surprise of Oedipus are essential features of the artist's narrative, and to assume that this is anything else than the actual delivery of the oracle is in the nature of an anticlimax. The contents of the patera, then, must be in a way the answer itself, and it remains to discover what they are. The angle at which the cup is held would certainly make it difficult to avoid an awkward spilling of any liquid contents, and I believe that therefore it is necessary to seek another explanation than lekanomancy for this engraving.

With this Apollo and with Themis is to be compared the figure of Apollo on a vase reproduced in various publications.¹ Here he is seated, but on a *βωμός*, and similarly holds the laurel and the phialé. Many interpretations have been given by scholars, of which the one most generally adopted is that it is connected with the legend that Apollo and Artemis visited the hyperborean region.² Others have suggested that it is to be linked with the Ion legend,³ or that it represents the visit of the Amazons to the temple of Apollo Patroüs after their defeat by Theseus; back of Apollo, according to this view, stand Hermes and Theseus.⁴ One critic, less explicit, says that it shows two young warriors, a Greek and a barbarian, who have come to the seat of Apollo to learn an oracle.⁵ If my surmise is correct, that Apollo with the attributes shown in this painting is essentially the prophesying god,⁶ this last view has at least so much that is true in it, although I am inclined to think that the figure in front of Apollo is Artemis and not a barbarian.⁷ Whatever the story illustrates, the scene is probably one of divination, that is, a consultation of Apollo, who himself presides over his own oracle.

¹ S. Reinach, *Peintures de vases antiques recueillies par Millin et Millingen* (Paris, 1891), Millin I, 46; Müller-Wieseler, *op. cit.*, II, No. 142; Panofka, *Heilgötter*, Pl. I, 10; Lenormant et DeWitte, *Élite céramographique*, II, Pl. 88 A; Heydemann, *Pariser Antiken*, p. 38; Furtwängler, *Sammlung Saburoff*, I, Einleitung, Vasenbilder 14, No. 12.

² Overbeck, *Griechische Kunstmythologie*, "Apollon," III, 326, No. 43.

³ Furtwängler.

⁴ Lenormant and DeWitte.

⁵ Stephani, *Compte rendu de St.-P.* (1873), pp. 203, 211; cf. *ibid.*, 1861, Pl. IV.

⁶ Cf. the attributes of the god in the Praenestine cista, in the paintings that are immediately to be mentioned, and in *Arch. Zeit.* (1858), Taf. 120, 1.

⁷ Cf. the very similar group shown by De Ridder, *Vases peints de la Bibliothèque Nationale*, II, 320, No. 428, where Artemis is unmistakable.

Apollo appears in a somewhat similar pose, and with similar attributes, in a few other paintings which may be mentioned, although there is much less probability than in the ones just mentioned that divination is the subject. In one, he is seated on the tripod, in the position normally occupied by his priestess, holding with his right hand on the level of his eyes a phialé, and with his left a rod or scepter. The laurel grows by the side of the tripod, which is also flanked by two attendant women, one carrying an oenochoë.¹ The purpose of the phialé may be rather uncertain, but there is a strong possibility that it is no more than a libation vessel. Another vase, perhaps a forgery, shows the god sitting in a chair, his hand and arm resting on the back and holding a wreath; the extended right hand supports a bowl deeper than the usual phialé. Before him dances Cassandra with torches in either hand.² Another very striking scene, which strongly suggests lekanomancy, is engraved on an Etruscan mirror; but it has been interpreted with some degree of certainty as the rejuvenation of Aeson by Medea in the presence of Athena.³

These groups are all that I am at present able to compare with the Themis vase as divinatory scenes of a somewhat similar character. Since the hypothesis of lekanomancy has been dismissed for them all, for the reasons stated, the original question still remains to be answered, and it will be best to inquire whether there was any other form of divination practiced at the Delphic shrine, or connected in any way with the name of Apollo, by means of which a more satisfactory and better grounded explanation of these scenes may be presented.

I believe that they can be satisfactorily explained and the interpretations successfully defended on literary and historical grounds if it be assumed that this class of paintings and engravings has to do with kleromancy or thrioboly, that is, some form of divination by means of lots or dice. It is hardly necessary to repeat here all the abundant evidence that exists to prove the antiquity and the prevalence of such arts in Greece, or even what is known of the various forms of manipulation of the divinatory objects employed; but it

¹ Reinach, *Répertoire*, II, 286, 2.

² Reinach, *op. cit.*, 296, 2.

³ *Mon. Ined.*, XI, Pl. III; *Annali* (1879), pp. 38-53.

is enough for the scope of this inquiry to show that Apollo was known as a patron of kleromancy, that kleromantic divination was practiced at Delphi before the foundation of the later oracle and continued there in historical times, and that the divining counters used by the Delphic kleromancers were kept in a phialé.¹

There is in the first place a valuable bit of evidence to be drawn from linguistic sources, which applies both to the question of lot oracles in Greece generally and to the existence of one at Delphi. It has long been recognized that the term ἀναιρεῖν, "to deliver an oracular response," the one most frequently used of the Pythia by prose writers, implies the use of lots, from which the priestess selects or "raises" the one that determines the answer; and it has also been suggested that χρᾶσθαι, χρησμός, "to give an oracle" and "an oracular response," ordinarily connoting "use" and "thing used" in their various allied forms, tend to show the same thing.²

Tradition, too, makes Apollo a very early patron of kleromancy, almost its inventor, in fact. His cult name Klarios is probably derived from κλήρος, "lot," and this with other facts points, as Hermann³ says, to the lot as a part of the oldest, essentially Ionian cult of Apollo. But the actual use of the lot is far better attested for Delphi than for Klaros; at the latter place the priest was inspired to prophecy by drinking from the sacred spring,⁴ whereas there is reason to believe that at Delphi the lot was used either as a primary or as a secondary means of divination throughout its history.⁵ The sacred lots at Delphi were known as μαντικά ψῆφοι or θρίαι;⁶ the latter word is not well understood, but may perhaps originally have meant "fig leaves," and may give a clue as to the earliest form of the oracle.⁷

¹ On kleromancy in general Halliday, *op. cit.*, chap. x, may be consulted. The author has collected most of the pertinent passages from the literature. J. G. Frazer's annotations to Paus. vii. 25. 10 set forth an important variety of kleromancy practiced in Greek temples in later times.

² Halliday, p. 211, with citations in n. 1; Farnell, IV, 191. Cf. too the use of πεσεῖν with χρησμός.

³ *Op. cit.*, p. 247, n. 15.

⁴ Iambl. *De myst.* iii. 11 (Parthey).

⁵ Cf. Bouché-Leclercq, I, 194.

⁶ Suidas, s.vv. θρίαι, θρία; Hesychius, s.vv. θρίαι, θριάζειν; *Etym. Magn.* s.vv. θρίαι, θρία; Bekker, *Anecd.*, I, 265, s.v. θριάσιον πεδίον; Philochorus fr. 196 *ap. Zen. Prov. cent.* v. 75; *schol. in Callim. Hymn. Ap.* 45.

⁷ *Etym. Magn.* θρία· κυρίως τὰ τῆς συκῆς φύλλα· καὶ θριάζειν τὸ φυλλολογεῖν. Suidas s.v. θρία has a similar statement; and cf. Hesychius s.v. θριάζειν. For another meaning (probably not original) see Lobeck, *Aglaophamus* 1345.

According to the legends these mantic lots derived their name from the Thriae, three nymphs, and popular etymology connected their name in turn with the numerals *τρεις* or *τρισαί*. The lexicographers and mythologists, together with the Homeric hymn to Hermes,¹ afford considerable information about them and Apollo's use of them. According to the lexicographers the three nymphs, daughters of Zeus, were the nurses of Apollo and dwelt on Parnassus; they discovered the three mantic counters and offered them to Athena; she, however, disclaimed them as a thing that did not belong to her (for this was in the province of Apollo) and threw them into the Thriasian Plain, which thus received its name. According to this form of the legend the Thriae were the originators of kleromancy, and they may be supposed to have taught it to their ward. Since Apollodorus, in relating the story of Apollo's cattle, represents Apollo as practicing kleromancy, we may infer that this was actually the case. Here Apollo is said to have learned "from his divining art" who stole the cattle; he exchanged the herd for the lyre of Hermes, and later, when Hermes made his flute, he bought this for the staff he had formerly used in tending his cattle, together with a lesson in divination by lot (*διὰ τῶν ψήφων*).

The Homeric hymn to Hermes (ll. 550 ff.) treats of this bargain:

ἄλλο δέ τοι ἐρέω, Μαιῆς ἐρικυδέος νιῆ
καὶ Διὸς αἰγιόχοιο
σεμναὶ γάρ τινές εἰσι κασίγνηται γεγαῖαι,
πάρθενοι ὠκείησιν ἀγαλλόμεναι πετρίγεσσι
τρῆϊς· κατὰ δὲ κρατὸς πεπαλαγμένοι ἀλφίτα λευκὰ
οἰκία ναιετάουσιν ὑπὸ πτυχὶ Παρνησοῦ,
μαντεῖης ἀπάνευθε διδάσκαλοι, ἦν ἐπὶ βουσι
παῖς ἔτ' ἔων μελέτῃσα· πατήρ δ' ἐμὸς οὐκ ἀλέγισεν.
ἐντεῦθεν δὴ ἔπειτα ποτώμεναι ἄλλοτε ἄλλῃ
κηρία βόσκονται καὶ τε κραίνουσι ἕκαστα.
αἱ δ' ὅτε μὲν θυίωσιν ἐδηδυῖαι μέλι χλωρὸν
προφρονέως ἐθέλουσιν ἀληθείην ἀγορεύειν·
ἦν δ' ἀπονοσφισθῶσι θεῶν ἡδέϊαν ἐδωδήν,
ψεύδονται δὴ ἔπειτα δι' ἀλλήλων δονέουσαι.
τάς τοι ἔπειτα διδωμι, σὺ δ' ἀτρεκέως ἐρεείνων
σὴν αὐτοῦ φρένα τέρπε, καὶ εἰ βροτὸν ἄνδρα δαείης
πολλάκι σῆς ὀμφῆς ἐπακούσεται, αἶ κε τύχησι.

¹ The lexicographers as cited above; Apollodorus *Bibl.* iii. 114 f.; *Hom. Hymn. Herm.* 550 ff. See also Lobeck, *Aglaophamus* 814.

This passage gives rise to many questions which have no place here. It is evident that it has reference to a different set of traditions from those found in the other sources, and it may not, indeed, concern kleromancy at all, but rather a variety of augury from the flight of bees.

It has been said with regard to these legends that they show that the lot oracle was abandoned by the cult of Apollo as a lower and more fallacious form of divination. This it may well have been, and it is true that Hermes was regarded as the patron of dicers. But Hermes did not become the possessor of great kleromantic oracles, nor do the myths (though I would not press this argument) represent Apollo as formally abandoning the lot; he teaches its use to Hermes, and only in the Homeric hymn, which probably has no reference to kleromancy, gives up the instruments of augury. The most that can be inferred is that kleromancy became in the Apolline cult secondary to other modes of prediction, and there is strong testimony for the belief that it was still practiced in historical times at Delphi and was always given a place in the ritual of the shrine.

There is, for example, the story that the Thessalians sent to Delphi a number of beans inscribed with the names of persons,¹ with the request that the god should draw one of these and indicate to them who was to be their king. Hyginus too uses language of the Delphic oracle that fits only kleromancy, when he states that Thyestes came to Delphi *ad sortes tollendas* and of Telephus that he *petit sortem ab Apolline*,² although too much weight should hardly be given to the mere verbal expressions of a late Latin writer. The fact is better attested that the lot continued to be used at Delphi as a means for determining the order of consultation,³ and an obscure and corrupt passage of Plutarch refers to the use of the lot, apparently not in the actual delivery of the response, but in connection with some ritual observances.⁴ The best piece of evidence, however, and one that throws light upon the question under discussion, is the

¹ Plut. *De frat. amor.* 21. 492 A., Halliday, p. 211; Farnell, IV, 191.

² *Fab.* 88, 101.

³ Hermann, *op. cit.*, p. 253, and p. 258, n. 15.

⁴ *De ei ap. Delph.* 16: τῆς γὰρ ἑκτῆς τοῦ νέου μηνὸς ὅταν κατάγῃ εἰς τὴν Πυθίαν εἰς τὴν πρυτανείον, ὁ πρῶτος ὑμῶν γίνεταί τῶν τριῶν κλήρων εἰς τὰ πέντε πρὸς ἀλλήλους ἐκείνοισι τὰ τρία οὐδὲ τὰ δύο βάλλοντες.

statement of Suidas preserved in his note on the word Πυθῶ; ἐν ᾧ [the Delphic sanctuary] χαλκοῦς τρίπους ἴδρυται καὶ ὑπερθεν φιάλη ἣ τὰς μαντικὰς εἶχε ψήφους, αἵτινες ἐρομένων μὲν τῶν μαντενομένων ἥλλοντο καὶ ἡ Πυθία ἐμφορουμένη ἔλεγεν ἃ ἐξέφερεν ὁ Ἀπόλλων.

So it seems certain that the counters were in existence in historic times and were kept in a phialé. Suidas' passage, however, gives rise to some further questions; for example, just what was the significance of the "jumping" of the counters? Farnell¹ speaks of this as being "in response to the questions of the consultants; and the functions of the Pythoness would seem to be entirely dispensed with in this process"; and in a note he says that Suidas seems to contaminate two distinct methods. He apparently understands that the two methods existed together, which may well have been the case. Bouché-Leclercq² too admits that Apollo's arrival at Delphi did not wholly exile kleromancy, which was certainly there in earliest times, but that it was used in conjunction with other methods, for example, to determine the order of consultation (a fact generally admitted) or to decide which of two meanings was to be adopted, in the case of an ambiguous oracle; perhaps, too, in cases resembling that of the Thessalians already mentioned. Undoubtedly, it is due to the conservatism of religion that this earlier and half-superseded form of divination retained through the centuries a place in the ritual, and that the mantic counters kept in the sacred place still showed by their "jumping"—managed we know not how—that the memory of their former importance must not fade out of the traditions of the shrine.

The painted and engraved scenes which have already been adduced show, I think, that the Greeks did in fact preserve the memory of the old lot oracle at Delphi, perhaps even that it did not lose its importance until a time much later than usually imagined, for artists seldom archaeologize.³ I suggest, therefore, that the

¹ *Op. cit.*, IV, 191.

² *Op. cit.*, I, 194. Halliday, pp. 211–12, suggests that "the consultation of the pebbles was a preliminary rite to discover whether Apollo would vouchsafe an answer."

³ There is evidence in Euripides, of uncertain value to be sure, that the Athenian of the fifth century turned as naturally to a kleromantic oracle as to any other, when necessity arose. I refer especially to *Hipp.* 1057 f.; ἡ δέλτος ἦδε, κλήρον οὐ δεδεγμένη, κατηγορεῖ σου πιστά, κτλ. κλήρος here is usually interpreted (e.g., by Wecklein, Paley, Mahaffy and Bury, and Murray in his translation) on the basis of

Themis vase, the Praenestine cista, and perhaps the other vase whereon Apollo appears are satisfactorily explained by the assumption, in each case, that the phialé is that mentioned by Suidas, the receptacle for the sacred divining counters. In the absence of information about the kind of lots used, and about the method of interpretation, it would be better perhaps to refrain from a fuller explanation of these scenes, and especially of the last-mentioned, the subject of which is so doubtful. But the Praenestine cista seems to show Apollo and Oedipus after the drawing has been made, and it is the result of the drawing which causes Oedipus so much surprise, while Themis is shown in a moment of deliberation just before "taking up" the lot.

It may be well at this point to consider an obvious objection to the explanation proposed for the Themis vase. Will this form of divination fit the story of Aegeus handed down in literature? The Euripidean version—which is substantially that of Plutarch—is found in the *Medea*, ll. 678–81. Aegeus has told Medea that he has returned from the ancient oracle of Phoebus—observe that in the literary form of the legend it is not Themis—and Medea has been informed that she may ask of him what the god said. Then follows (ll. 678 ff.):

MH. τί δῆτ' ἔχρησε; λέξον, εἰ θέμις κλύειν.

AI. ἀσκού με τὸν προύχοντα μὴ λῦσαι πόδα

MH. πρὶν ἂν τί δράσης ἢ τίν' ἐξίκη χθόνα;

AI. πρὶν ἂν πατρώων αὐθις ἐστίαν μὀλω.

The answer of the god was certainly cryptic and complicated; could it have been gained by the use of lots? I believe that this difficulty, the reality of which must be granted, can be met, and I shall outline a few reasons for such a belief. (1) It is possible—though I do not think it necessary to assume this—that the vase-painter has in mind a version of the legend of Aegeus entirely different from the literary

scholia on these lines and on *Phoen.* 838 ff. as referring to signs used by augurs to describe the flight of birds; but the scholia have only the doubtful (and hesitating) support of Eustathius, *In Il.*, p. 317, 52; and Weil in his note confidently explains the passage as referring to kleromancy. As to *Phoen.*, 838 ff., which has been interpreted on the same grounds as a reference to ornithoscopy alone, it is to be noted that Hermann (*op. cit.*, II, 248, n. 16) pronounces it a combination of ornithoscopy with kleromancy, with the excellent confirmation to be taken from Pindar *Pyth.* iv. 190. The scholia may easily be worthless, and most probably kleromancy enters into both Euripidean passages. Nothing, however, can be inferred from *Ion* 908.

one, and that in this version the oracle appeared in simpler form. We have already seen that in the introduction of Themis for Apollo he has violently disagreed with the better-known form of the story. But there is no further suggestion in ancient records of a different version from that known to Euripides, so that it will be well, if possible, to rest the defense of this interpretation on other grounds. (2) Although in its simplest form lot divination must have given for the most part simple "yes" and "no" answers, or have served to designate names and individuals out of a group, there were forms that could return answers of greater complexity; and although we know little of the form of the old Delphic oracle, it may well be that it too could on occasion return more than mere positive and negative responses. Indeed, it is reasonable to suppose that the priests at the shrine, who were of course experts in the science of kleromancy, would have at their command various forms to suit the different needs of consultants. As a bare suggestion it might be said that if the science of interpreting the veining of leaves, for example, as developed in ancient Delphi, there would be a possibility of great complexity in the responses. It has been seen that the name *θρίαι* may well have meant originally "fig leaves," and there is evidence of the employment of very similar means of divination elsewhere, so that this suggestion, which, however, I do not care to insist upon, is not so unlikely as it may seem at first sight.¹ (3) It must be remembered that the form of the oracles as finally delivered to the consultant was the result of formulation of the original material derived from the god's mouthpiece. In later times it is well known that the priests of the temple interpreted and put into verse the unintelligible mutterings of the Pythia and that often their cunning led them to employ enigmatic or ambiguous terms. The form of the

¹ Professor Bonner has pointed out to me that there is a Japanese custom of divining by the interpretation of the cracks in a heated tortoise-shell. Omoplatoscopy in fact, a rite practiced by many races (and in certain forms by the classical nations; cf. Halliday's index), is of the nature suggested. Cf. Hastings, *Encycl. of Religion and Ethics*, IV, 789, 802 (for the Japanese custom). There is a record of divination by means of palm leaves, on which the names of the gods were to be written, in *Pap. Oxy.* 886 (Grenfell and Hunt, *Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, VI, 200 f.; also in G. Milligan, *Selections from the Greek Papyri* [Cambridge, 1912], pp. 110 ff.). The South American Aymará Indians practice divination by means of coca leaves (reported, but with not much detail, by Adolph F. Bandelier, *The Islands of Titicaca and Koati*, Hispanic Society, New York, 1910, Part III, 126).

response to Aegeus as reported by Euripides, in fact, gives evidence in its cryptic wording of having been subjected to this very process. So too in the early days, or whenever kleromancy was used, the kleromantic oracles may have been delivered in verse based upon a much simpler original derived from the nature or the combination of the lots. (4) The best way out of the difficulty, however, is to point to the usage of vase-painters generally and to say that our artist did not in the first place attempt to *illustrate*, accurately and consistently, the Aegeus legend, and that in the second place he did not stop to analyze the whole matter as closely as we have done. The results of studies of the vase-paintings based on Homeric subjects have conclusively shown that the painter's object was not to illustrate, in the proper sense of the word. So here the artist has in the first place made so free with the legend as to introduce Themis—a gratifying mark of antiquity, doubtless—and then in keeping with his portrayal of the ancient goddess he has depicted a form of divination different from the one ordinarily employed in his time, but still in use at Delphi and bearing the reputation of the highest antiquity. And he did this without considering the difficulty it makes with regard to the form of the oracle traditionally received by Aegeus. But even this, the last remaining obstacle, might perhaps also be removed if we knew exactly what the Delphic oracular lots were, how they were interpreted, and how the answers were finally formulated, or, what is more to the point, with what sort of kleromancy the artist himself was familiar and which he had in mind when he depicted this scene.

I realize that the question here considered is of such a nature that one would be rash to call the conclusion that has been reached a solution and not a theory. But though these arguments may not amount to an exact demonstration, I would again point out, in closing, that the hypothesis here advocated has strong support from the side of sacred history, and that it affords a better explanation than has hitherto been advanced for the deep meditation of Themis and the dismayed surprise of Oedipus. Perhaps further investigation might show that other scenes in which Apollo holds the phialé are capable of similar interpretation; but this would have to be done with the greatest caution.